Could you live on a remote island?

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Write ten words to describe how you imagine a small remote island to be and things you would expect to find there.

b. Compare your words. Then, scan the article to see how many of your words fit with the type of remote islands described there.

2 Find the information

Find the following information in the article.

1. the name of two islands off the coast of Wales
2. the name of an island off the coast of Scotland
3. the name of an island off the coast of England
4. a word that describes people who love islands
5. the names of four kinds of seabirds
6. the collective noun for a group of birds

3 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mere</th>
<th>cacophony</th>
<th>warden</th>
<th>cosy</th>
<th>crucial</th>
<th>self-sufficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>day trippers</td>
<td>elation</td>
<td>flee</td>
<td>insularity</td>
<td>austere</td>
<td>tiffs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. someone whose job is to be responsible for a particular place and who checks that rules are obeyed

2. escape from a place very quickly

3. able to provide everything that you need by yourself, without help from other people

4. warm and comfortable and making you feel relaxed

5. an unpleasant mixture of loud sounds

6. people who make a journey for pleasure in which they go to a place and come back on the same day

7. used for emphasizing that something is small

8. a way of living that is simple and not very comfortable

9. the fact of being alone or not meeting anyone

10. If something is __________________________, it is extremely important because it has a major effect on the result of something.

11. minor arguments

12. a feeling of great happiness and excitement
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**Extreme conditions, loud birds and fresh food by boat – could you live on a remote island?**

The wardens of Britain’s small islands talk about daily life with little more than thousands of puffins for company

Patrick Barkham
20 April, 2019

1 After supper, while Eddie Stubbings was washing up, huge flocks of puffins would come whirling past his kitchen window. Later, when the sun had finally dipped into the ocean, the Skomer night filled with the bizarre cry of 350,000 pairs of manx shearwaters, which fly across the small island.

2 “Living on the island was absolutely amazing,” says Stubbings, 40. Alongside his partner, Bee Bueche, 41, he has completed six years working on Skomer, 720 acres of seabird-populated rocks off the Pembrokeshire coast in Wales.

3 Whenever a job advertisement for warden of a small island appears, hundreds of islophiles apply, seeking to flee the tyranny of modern life. It wasn’t always this way: historically, many of the 6,200-odd small islands that make up the British archipelago have been prisons, literally or figuratively, with their isolated residents eventually choosing to leave for a mainland that offers more comfort, companionship and opportunities.

4 Now there is a reverse migration, with people chasing intimacy with nature. As conservation charities have found a new use for small islands – as sanctuaries for rare seabirds – formerly “empty” ones have been repopulated by wildlife wardens.

5 Stubbings and Bueche left at the end of 2018, but they have not had enough of small islands: they are now doing conservation work on Islay, in Scotland.

6 The appeal of a small island, Bueche says, is not just being closer to nature – it is being self-sufficient. “Everything that breaks you have to fix yourself,” she says. “It’s challenging and exciting – you have to look after yourself, use your brain, initiative and imagination. Even not being cosy is great – you wake up and feel the cold and chop wood and put the wood burner on. It makes me feel really alive.”

7 Like most people overseeing the wildlife of small islands, Stubbings and Bueche were drawn to this work through their love of birds. Skomer was “absolutely incredible” for them, Stubbings says: thousands of guillemots, razorbill, puffins and, most of all, the noisy, nocturnal shearwaters. Many people struggle to sleep in this cacophony; Stubbings and Bueche found it soothing.

8 Plenty of people apply for jobs on Skomer seeking to be alone, Stubbings says, but they would be disappointed. “You have to tell them that’s really not what you’re going to find.” It is “a hustle bustly” workplace, he says. “You never get five minutes to yourself. People come and knock on your door asking questions at 8pm, 9pm, 10pm.”

9 Their working day as Skomer wardens began with a call to the boatman to see if the weather would permit boats to run. Skomer receives 250 day trippers during the peak bird-breeding months of May and June and accommodates 16 overnight guests. As well as birds and seals to count, there are beds to make, staff and volunteers to organize and VIPs from international ecologists to film-makers to support. “People probably want to hear we’re wild and remote and cut off from the world,” Stubbings says. “The brutal truth is, these days, you’re not. Everyone has got the internet and mobile phones in their pockets, and there are plenty of people on the island.”

10 Stubbings and Bueche’s neighbours on nearby Skokholm, Richard Brown, 38, and Giselle Eagle, 34, have it slightly quieter: a mere 90,000 pairs of manx shearwaters to monitor and only two boats a week, bringing 20 paying guests to the island.

11 Brown and Eagle live in a lighthouse, surrounded by puffins, but appear more practical than dreamy. “We’re a bit like tour reps,” Brown says. “When people first think about island residents, they think of an isolated existence. But I imagine we meet more people during the year than most people on the mainland.”

12 They receive a fresh-food delivery by boat once a month. “There’s no reason not to eat well on an island. We have a lot of root vegetables,” Brown says. “We’ve got loads of tinned and dried stuff if our delivery doesn’t happen,” Eagle laughs.

13 It sounds austere, but Brown says it is much more luxurious than when he began. “When I started out on the island, it was still gas lights and no hot water unless you boiled it. These days, we’ve got solar power and solar hot water and a 4G signal.”


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14 The weather is the force that most shapes the life of Dean Woodfin Jones, the warden of Lundy in the Bristol Channel, off the coast of England. "Everything we do is dictated by the weather – Mother Nature is truly in charge here," he says. Lundy, 1,100-acres of granite, sitting high above the sea, has 29 residents who are employed by the Landmark Trust, the charity that protects the island. I asked one islander how she got on with her fellow residents. "Carefully," she replied. Small island communities can be claustrophobic. As Stubbings puts it: "If you can’t cope with the insularity, you’re going to explode because you’re on a small island with a small group of people."

15 Small talk is crucial on small islands, Woodfin Jones explains. "We’re quite social and like having a drink in the sunshine or going snorkelling together. There’s always tiffs between people, but they tend to work themselves out most of the time."

16 The role of small islands as sanctuaries for endangered wildlife seems wholly positive, but not everyone agrees. Tourism, one islander said, was degrading. "If you don’t have development, what have you got – a museum?"

18 Every small islander seems permanently touched by their life as a minority species, surrounded by salt water, space and, occasionally, peace. Stubbings and Bueche departed Skomer because Stubbings had long dreamed of working in the Arctic. "It’s not for everyone," Bueche says of small-island life. "If you wanted a family, you’d really struggle, but we decided this life is for us, and we’re not going to have a family." She finds her appreciation of the mainland deepened by her small-island exile. "A hot shower! Central heating! A comfy bed! If you fancy a cucumber, you can go to the shop and get it. When you live on the mainland, you don’t get any elation from going and buying a cucumber. After being on an island, you start to really value these things again."

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4 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Why do more and more people want to leave the mainland to live on remote islands?
2. What sort of tasks and responsibilities make up the job of a wildlife warden?
3. Why doesn’t everyone believe that turning remote islands into wildlife sanctuaries is a good idea?
4. Why are you not likely to feel lonely despite being on a remote island?
5. Why is the ability to make small talk important on a remote island?
6. In what ways has life on remote islands become more comfortable over recent years?
7. Despite this, in what ways do residents of remote islands need to be self-sufficient?

5 An expression

1. Find and underline the expression hustle and bustle in the article (used in a different form).
2. Choose the correct meaning.
   a. a lot of loud arguments
   b. a lot of noisy activity
   c. a lot of difficult work tasks
3. Share your answers to these questions.
   • Is there a lot of hustle and bustle in your workplace?
   • In general, do you enjoy the hustle and bustle of everyday life, or do you try to flee from it?
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6 Discussion

- How far is it to the sea from where you are now?
- What is the nearest island or group of islands?
- Does anyone live there?
- What kind of wildlife lives there?
- How easy or difficult is it to get there?
- Is it a place that day trippers or tourists visit? Why? Why not?
- Have you ever been to a small remote island?
  - If so, describe your experience.
  - If not, is there a small island that you would like to visit?
- Bee Bueche mentions some things that she now really appreciates when she is on the mainland (para 19). What things do you think you would miss if you lived on a remote island?

7 Group task

Work in small groups to complete the following task.

- Brainstorm things you would like to include on your packing list for a year on a remote island.
- Divide these into essential items and luxuries.
  - Do not include food or small items that you might be able to order every now and again (such as shampoo and candles) as these will all, weather-permitting, arrive by boat every month.
- Make a list of ten to 20 items that you all agree on and that would fit on a small boat.
- Compare your lists with other students and say why you would want to take each of the items on your list.

8 Webquest

Research one of the islands or seabirds mentioned in the article, and present your findings to the class.
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KEY

2 Find the information

1. Skomer; Skokholm
2. Islay
3. Lundy
4. islophiles
5. guillemots, razorbills, puffins, shearwaters
6. flock

3 Key words

1. warden
2. flee
3. self-sufficient
4. cosy
5. cacophony
6. day trippers
7. mere
8. austere
9. insularity
10. crucial
11. tiffs
12. elation

4 Comprehension check

1. to escape the tyranny of modern life
2. counting and keeping track of birds and other animals such as seals; organizing staff and volunteers; making sure that accommodation is prepared for overnight guests
3. One resident of the island said that it was degrading and that what the island really needs is development. Without that, the islands are nothing more than museums.
4. Birdwatchers, ecologists and film-makers stay overnight. At peak times, there may be hundreds of other day trippers, too.
5. because people need to be sociable. There are tiffs occasionally, but they work themselves out most of the time
6. Everyone has mobile phones and access to the internet. There is solar power, which provides electricity and hot water.
7. They need to be able to fix things when they break, chop their own firewood, make their supplies last and be inventive with meals if the supply boat can’t come.

5 An expression

2. b